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ABSTRACT

Help with the complex legal and ethical issues related to affirmative action programs is provided by several American Library Association (ALA) groups and agencies. Conference activities are sponsored by the Public Library Association, various minority caucuses, task forces of the Social Responsibilities Round Table, and committees of the Library Administration Division Personnel Administration Section. The most helpful source of information and advice is the ALA Office for Library Personnel Resources (OLPR). This office has developed guidelines, sponsored institutes, and established a minority referral network. At present OLPR compiles statistics, reviews individual libraries' existing affirmative action plans, and makes available an "Affirmative Action Packet" which is continually updated. (LS)

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Public Libraries and Affirmative Action:

EXPLOITING THE RESOURCES OF AIA

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A Paper Presented at the

Public Library Association

Idea Exchange

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Public Libraries and Affirmative Action:
Exploiting the Resources of AIA

The complex legal and ethical problems posed by affirmative action are not likely easily to be resolved. One recognizes the need to compensate for the denial of full employment rights to large groups of people and the need to recognize the rights of each individual, but no one seems at all sure how (or even if) both may best be done at the same time. Laws and court decisions conflict, as do the opinions of the federal agencies responsible for enforcing them. And even public libraries which have long been concerned with equal opportunities for advancement for all citizens in their communities can find no easy way to guarantee equal opportunity for employment on their own staffs.

Though most public librarians are now aware that affirmative action plans have become an organizational necessity and many are involved either in drafting one or in collecting information for a comprehensive plan being developed by their city or county, few are as knowledgeable as they should be about the various groups with affirmative action concerns which are part of or have some connection to the American Library Association. Every ALA conference in recent years has offered some opportunity to attend meetings dealing with affirmative action concerns, even if all too often these meetings are so deeply buried in the complexities of the summer conference program that some time has elapsed after the conference before one realizes what was missed and what spoonful of the alphabet soup in the AIA Handbook of Organization was responsible for sponsoring it. In this year's program merely checking the index under affirmative action will yield references to three programs specifically dealing with affirmative action in the course of three days, including the one you are presently attending.

While the Public Library Association has given sufficient publicity to its

Idea Exchange to have attracted wider interest prior to the conference than perhaps is the case with the other two programs, the Wednesday morning meeting of the Asian-American Librarians Caucus, which features the regional director of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is one example of the worthwhile and often inadequately publicized programs and discussions which frequently take place at meetings of the variety of minority caucuses you may find represented in your convention program. Each of these caucuses, from those that, like the Asian-American caucus, represent groups specifically protected by federal law to those that, like the new Italian American Librarians Caucus, represent ethnic groups lacking such specific protection, is likely to be dealing with affirmative action issues. The former group of caucuses may represent groups with which you must deal in your affirmative action plan, whereas the latter group does not, but all groups are covered in some way by laws against discrimination in employment and deal in some way with ethical and legal issues of interest to libraries.

To these groups should be added the various task forces of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT), one of which is sponsoring a "Sensitivity and Awareness" discussion of affirmative action Thursday morning. Many--perhaps even most--SRRT activities are in some way related to the interests of groups often subjected to discrimination, and there are two SRRT task forces--the Task Force on Women and the Gay Liberation Task Force--representing additional affirmative action groups (one protected by federal law and the other covered, for libraries in communities without local protective legislation, only by ALA policy) which do not have separate caucuses meeting at ALA conferences focussing on their rights.

All the above groups have such natural connections with affirmative action

that interested persons should automatically look for them in AIA conference programs if they want to identify all treatments of affirmative action scheduled during the conference week. Following the activities of the various AIA committees with concerns in this area can also be worthwhile. For example, any committee in the Library Administration Division Personnel Administration Section (LAD/PAS) is likely to be working on matters related to affirmative action. The LAD/PAS Economic Status, Welfare, and Fringe Benefits Committee, the title of which may not sound promising to you, is, for example, right now involved in the drafting of a list of "Questionable Questions" which employers should avoid asking in employment interviews. It would be difficult to discuss any personnel-related issue for very long without getting into affirmative action.

If you are seeking a group specifically concerned with affirmative action as such, you will find the AIA Office for Library Personnel Resources (OLPR) without a doubt the most helpful source of advice and information in AIA. It was to OLPR that most of the responsibility for implementing the AIA Equal Employment Opportunity Policy (passed by AIA Council in January, 1974) was given. This includes the development of guidelines for library affirmative action, the provision of information on affirmative action requirements, and the review of the affirmative action plans which the same policy directed all libraries and library schools with fifteen or more staff members to produce.

OLPR has responded to this in many ways. An OLPR-sponsored Affirmative Action Institute was held in December, 1974, out of which came most of the plans so far submitted to OLPR for review. The office staff is now encouraging the development of such institutes on a local level, sponsored by state library agencies, library schools, or other interested organizations. Efforts have been made through recruiting trips, contacts with various minority group organizations, and the

establishment of a minority referral network to put prospective minority students in touch with library schools, thereby helping to increase the pool of minority librarians in the profession from which prospective employers might draw. (All this, of course, is made even more effective when concerned practitioners like yourselves help by encouraging promising candidates they identify among their workers and users.) OLPR is also aware of the urgent need for more accurate statistics describing the current ethnic and sexual composition of the workforce available for recruitment purposes and produces an annual statistical survey of new library school graduates, which helps to indicate the ethnic and sexual composition of the pool from which librarians are normally recruited to fill beginning positions. Funding is being sought for a planned ethnic/sexual library workforce composition and salary survey to provide more reliable data on the profession as a whole.

OLPR also offers more immediate assistance to individual libraries and librarians. Perhaps the most important OLPR service to libraries which already have affirmative action plans is the promised review of such plans to ascertain compliance with the law and with ALA policy. Two years of preparation have gone by since the ALA Equal Employment Opportunity Policy was approved by Council, and the OLPR Equal Employment Opportunity Subcommittee (established to carry out this review of plans) is now ready to proceed. Indeed, the review of affirmative action plans has already begun. In your July/August issue of American Libraries you will find the call for the submission of affirmative action plans, a call accompanied by the full text of the ALA Equal Employment Opportunity Policy and a set of guidelines for the evaluation of plans. Libraries willing to submit their plans for review will be furnished with a five-page evaluation of their plans' strengths and weaknesses. As the plans submitted reveal problem areas in

which information or education seems generally needed, the subcommittee or OLPR itself will expand into further educational activities addressed to the specific problems causing the most trouble for libraries--something it is hoped will prove far more useful than the more general treatments of affirmative action plan requirements (most of them written for large privately owned businesses) which are currently available.

For libraries not this far advanced in the process of developing an affirmative action plan, the guidelines published in American Libraries offer much useful advice on the drafting of such plans. Even more information and advice is to be found in a weighty compilation of the latest information on library workforce composition, affirmative action plan requirements, and sources for minority recruitment which is available from OLPR (Office for Library Personnel Resources, American Library Association, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611; ask for the "Affirmative Action Packet") for a dollar. (The packet is continually being updated and is therefore probably worth ordering a second time even if you have an older version on hand.) Should you need information on matters not covered by either the guidelines or the contents of the OLPR Affirmative Action Packet, write OLPR directly to ask for help: direct responses to individual requests for assistance are another important part of OLPR's responsibilities.

There is still much to be done in the field of affirmative action, and all too much that hangs upon uncertainties not to be resolved until further Supreme Court decisions clarify legal issues on which lower courts disagree. But for the librarian who knows what ALA has to offer, there are more resources to be exploited than most of us have yet tapped. In this as in most other professional matters, there should be some help available for you through ALA, no matter what your individual problem may be.